
Comments made by Mr. Philip Anschutz prior to the screening of the movie *Amazing Grace* in Paris on February 6, 2008 at UNESCO Headquarters to a group of UNESCO ambassadors and staff.

Introduction

I would like to express my appreciation for this evening's event to Director General Matsuura, as well as my thanks to Ambassadors Oliver and Landymore for organizing this screening and special premiere in France.

I believe those of us in this room sincerely want to help people, do something positive for children, and improve the plight of humanity and generally to effect good in the world.

I would also have to assume that most of us periodically become dispirited by the sheer size of the problems and doubts of our personal ability to have any impact -- the ocean seems so large and our boat so small!

The movie that you are about to see this evening -- *Amazing Grace* -- is essentially a message of hope; of optimism for the human condition; and of the power of one person (or a small group of people working together) to effect positive change in the world ... SO BE ENCOURAGED!

Background on Walden Media and Bristol Bay Productions

Before discussing this particular movie, I am going to make a few comments on the American film industry and the type of films our company makes:

Research shows that in the United States the average child between the ages of 4 and 18 spends about five hours a day with electronic media (mostly driven by movies). Since the year 2000, Hollywood has turned out over five times as many R-rated films as it has G- or PG-rated films. For those of you who may not be familiar with the American film-rating system, that means that the majority of films being produced had excessive violence, sex or subjects otherwise deemed inappropriate for children under the age of 17 and, therefore, for young families.

In addition, on a personal level, I find a great many of the films to be tasteless, irrelevant, demeaning and potentially damaging to our society and especially to our young people -- as you might guess, I am not a big supporter of these type films.

By comparison, our company (our movie brands are Walden Media and Bristol Bay Productions) makes films appropriate for families and younger audiences – movies that have life-reaffirming messages and positive moral messages.

Most of our movies are based on award-winning books, selected by our film makers in conjunction with a large group of teachers and librarians. One of our goals is to encourage children to read – and to read good books.

Sometimes the critics like the movies I make, and sometimes they don't. I suppose it is better if they do, but in the end it doesn't make much difference to me – because:

I already have a full-time job outside the movie business, so my livelihood isn't dependent on the movies; and I don't make movies for critics – I make movies for people. People like you, me and our families – movies like:

Holes

Around the World in 80 Days

Where the Red Fern Grows

Because of Winn-Dixie

Ray (The Ray Charles Story)

Charlotte's Web

The Bridge to Terabithia

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe

and currently showing in Paris theaters: *Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium* and *The Water Horse: Legend of the Deep*.

These are all movies with some redeeming values -- and I might add -- movies that won't embarrass people like us if we happen to accompany our children or grandchildren to the movies.

Amazing Grace

About tonight's movie -- *Amazing Grace*

- 1) We released the film in 2007 – the 200th anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Bill passing in the English House of Commons in 1807.
- 2) It is a period piece set in England and the time period is about 1785 to 1807.
- 3) The principal characters in the film – all of whom were very real – and the actors portraying them are:

William Wilberforce (Ioan Gruffudd)

John Newton (Albert Finney)

Former slave-ship captain
Mentor to Wilberforce
Anglican minister and author of the world's most beloved and recognized hymn:
Amazing Grace

The Duke of Clarence (Tobey Jones - Truman Capote in *In Cold Blood*)
Son of the King of England and large slave owner
An opposition leader in the House of Commons

Lord Tarleton (Ciaran Hands - *Caesar, Fall of Rome*)
British field commander, perhaps best known for his cold-blooded effectiveness
against American troops in the Revolutionary War

Equiano (Youssou N'Dour - singer from Sierra Leone and descendent of slaves)
Former slave who bought his freedom and became a leader in the abolition of
slavery movement

William Pitt (Benedict Cumberbatch)
Prime Minister through a very difficult period in British history.

Lord Charles Fox (Michael Gambon - Dumbledore in *Harry Potter*)
An opposition leader who joined forces with Wilberforce to pass the legislation
enabling the end of the slave trade – proving that you can make common cause
with your opponents on some issues without agreeing on all issues.

Barbara Spooner (Wilberforce's wife) (Romola Garai)
A leader in her own right for the improvement of living conditions of the poor

Thomas Clarkson (Rufus Sewell)
A leader in the abolitionist movement and a bit of a revolutionary as well

Michael Apted – Director

Historical Accuracy in the Movie

We went to great lengths for historical accuracy and employed historians as advisors.

1. The words spoken – especially in the debates in the House of Commons – were actually the words used;
2. It is faithful to the manners, conduct and dress of the times;
3. The set we built for the House of Commons was accurate for the time -- not the way it looks now;

4. One of the docks and buildings where slaves were actually unloaded and sold was located, cleaned up and used in the movie;
5. The slave ship: “Madagascar” is a reproduction of an actual slave ship of the period.

Facts about William Wilberforce

A few facts about the hero of tonight’s movie

William Wilberforce was:

1. A man of great and abiding faith who changed the world for the better and in the process became a true hero for humanity;
2. Born into a wealthy family;
3. Well educated and attended Cambridge. He was a bit of a playboy as a young man, yet experienced a conversion to faith and commitment which dramatically altered his life;
4. A lifelong friend of William Pitt;
5. One of the outstanding orators and debaters of his time;
6. A member of parliament for about 40 years and most historians seem to agree that he could have become Prime Minister had he not elected to pursue a different course with his life;
8. Almost penniless at his death, having given away most of his money to charity;
9. Always a staunch English patriot, even though he was friends with Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin (certainly all strong American patriots);
10. Plagued throughout most of his life by ill health (an intestinal illness);
11. A member of ‘The Clapham Group,’ comprised of his circle of friends/allies, which was known as the leading group in England agitating for social and cultural change. They organized 70 philanthropic societies covering a wide range of issues most of which still exist today – e.g. *prison reform; women’s suffrage; child labor reform; humane treatment of animals; the Salvation Army; first national museum of art*; to name but a few.

Themes in *Amazing Grace*

The movie addresses a number of important themes/issues:

1. The question of slavery and the righting of a great wrong at the time – but raising the awareness today of the fact that almost 30 million people are enslaved in some form. Historians estimate that in 1800 approximately 11 million people were enslaved. So it is an even greater problem today – even though it is illegal in almost all countries.
2. A coming to personal faith and the larger question of faith in a secular world.
3. An awakening of a social consciousness in a society;
4. The persistence and power of just one individual, combined with just a few others, to actually effect change in the culture.
5. The movie attempts to bring to the forefront the best of the human spirit: qualities such as faith, charity, integrity, courage, conviction, leadership, optimism, and perseverance.

Events occurring during the period covered in the movie

Every generation has its challenges – just as we have ours today they certainly had theirs.

During the period of the movie:

1. England was fighting, and losing, an ongoing war in its American Colonies;
2. A violent revolution was occurring in France – which came dangerously close to spreading to many other countries;
3. The subsequent Napoleonic wars engulfed all of Europe in conflict.

Now -- can you imagine the audacity of two young men – Wilberforce and Pitt – thinking they could actually have an impact on their world during those turbulent times? Yet their actions led directly to a number of sweeping changes in the culture and the rise of a new social consciousness in England – spreading to other parts of the world.

I would like to share a couple additional facts with you – quite extraordinary ones really – Wilberforce was 21 when first elected to the House of Commons and Pitt was 24 when he became England's youngest-ever prime minister!

Conclusion

In closing, let me say:

We need more leaders like William Wilberforce in our lives. We are all too familiar with the problems that good people face. To paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King: “when faced with such problems we have two options: we can act like a thermometer and merely make a record, or we can act like a thermostat and correct what is wrong.”

Here at UNESCO, you have that option – whether you are fighting poverty, AIDS, illiteracy, hunger or slavery – to actually make a difference and correct what is wrong.

I would hope our little movie this evening is more than just a ‘feel-good movie’ – that it is in fact a ‘DO-GOOD movie’ – a call to action and inspiration for us all to make a better world.

One final comment:

Please stay in your seats for at least the start of the end credits – if you like bagpipes and the Amazing Grace hymn!
